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## THE ALLIGATOR MARKET.

Prices Range from 50 cents to \$200  
—Hundreds are Sent to  
Europe.

"How do you sell the best, madame?" asked the inquisitive reporter of a quiet-looking woman who was the one peaceful object in the screaming, noisy world about her.

"Well, I hardly know how to answer that question," she responded, her voice pitched high enough to penetrate the chirping, squeaking, cawing and crowing of the congregation of feathered folk fluttering about. "You see, they come at most any price, and when I tell you they come all the way from 50 cents to \$200 a piece, you can understand how prices vary."

As is well known, sugar, oranges and alligators form three staples in Louisiana exports and internal revenue, and it was to discover the exact condition of the crocodile market, and whether the spring catch had been good, that a visit was paid yesterday to the big tanks on Chartres Street.

There is a lavish liberality and a free, unstinted prodigality in the way one of these reptiles lay eggs that would discourage anything short of a patent incubator. Why, without half putting her mind to it, and in a poor season at that, she will fill her nest with seventy-five eggs and crawl away comfortably, assured every last one will produce a healthy little yellow and black wriggler. Just here it is that the expert hunter comes in for a soft thing. He knows the favorite laying grounds of the alligator hens as thoroughly as Johnny does his bantam's nest in the barn, and when the time comes for the exhausted mother to cease from her labors, he simply paddles out, fills his canoe with the thick-skinned, pearly globes, and feels sure of a fine return later on.

Alligators are brought into town in every stage, from an embryo state in the egg to great, angry monsters a dozen feet long, tipping the scales hundreds of pounds. Men hunt their hideous game after dark, stalking the swamps, dragging lagoons, and wading through low, oozy marshes, where vast numbers of alligators abide. Several methods of capturing them are resorted to. Those caught with hooks are only fit for immediate killing, as they sicken and die in short order. The big ones are lassoed, and smaller fry snared in a heavy seine made for this purpose. The hunter realizes he is after dangerous game, with lots of vicious habits, and so, besides blinding their stupid eyes by a lamp worn in his cap, he is prepared to send a soothing bullet whenever necessary.

After bringing in his find of eggs the crocodile farmer heaps them in boxes and simply depends on time to do its perfect work. In the course of weeks the infant gnaws and claws at the hard shell until he finally squirms his way into the world. There is as much difference in the skin of the young and old ones as in a baby's complexion as compared with a grown person's. Their hide is as brilliant as if polished, a bright black and yellow, which grows dingier and rustier every year they live.

Passing through the big bird store, the alligator region is reached. It is a pretty, garden-like place, with tender, lacy vines trained in delicate festoons up the lattice against the dark brick wall. Great red pots hold rich foliage plants that lend a tropical air to the spot, fitting the inhabitants of the long, cemented tanks. These troughs are built six in a row, the occupants being carefully graded according to size. There is very little family affection among them, parents rarely hesitating to sacrifice their offspring on the altar of a healthy appetite. Survival of the fittest is an unanswerable law to which all must succumb; consequently they are classified into 2 and 3-year-olds. Twice a week the water must be changed for the salubrity of the atmosphere. There is a notorious untamed odor about an alligator that must be regarded. It is the perfume he brought from his wild, free life in the forest, and hangs about him with unvarying steadfastness. Twice a week refreshments are handed round, beef lights, as a rule, a delicacy for which the alligators have a very pronounced penchant. The half grown variety eat from five to six at a meal, distending their uncomely, shapeless stomachs until the receptacles refuse to hold another particle. They feed only at intervals, but have voracious appetites then.

They are very ugly creatures with wretched dispositions, as the reporter had a fair opportunity of discovering. Hanging over the side of the tank in playful almost intimate relations with the beast, his sheltering umbrella gave a tip too far and touched the extreme point of the thing's snout. It was enough; with a terrifying bellow and blowing off of steam the infuriated being rose two inches out of the water and sent his observer exactly three feet in the air. It was a severe shock, and has generated respect, if not admiration, for the alligator's sensitiveness. Lying in the sunshine, every grisly feature is accentuated. Their great, shaggy heads float on the water with stupid, evil eyes that blink like yellow excrescences on a mud-colored surface. A tiny, minute slit in the snout admits enough air to enable them to make a sound frightful enough to scare the stoutest hearted.

The keeper of the tanks said hundreds were sold yearly to traveling showmen, numbers being sent to Europe as curiosities, besides many that were bought by northern visitors. Saloon owners buy them constantly to keep on their counters as an attraction to possess, Chicago and St. Louis being noticeable among the number. An artist here in town sets them up with all sorts of comical devices. He stuffs them with cotton, and fashions preachers, lawyers, gamblers, organ-grinders, cotton handlers, dunces out of the ridiculous little figures. One, a burlesque scene in court, was particularly amusing. They are sold very cheaply, and a pretty fair trade is driven.

The saurian merchant has a perfect treasure that he keeps in close quarters and guards as the fairest jewel of his entire collection of beauties. It is a huge, evil-smelling, sluggish reptile measuring twelve feet, whose age is calculated at 150 years. He lies sprawled out on the floor of his trough, in a state of torpid stupidity. The creature looks bored to death, and with enough impotent malignity in his depraved yellow eyes to devour every visitor who studies his unbandsome proportions. The tropical beast is entirely out of place, surrounded with fresh air and the perfume of flowers. One fancies him crawling slowly from the heat and lime of some lagoon, lying in wait for prey that has no chance between those weighty jaws.

—New Orleans Times-Democrat.

## MISCELLANEOUS.

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